DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 490 EA 016 077

AUTHOR Wright, Douglas A.; And Others
TITLE School District Perceptions of Federal Competitive Education Programs. Final Report. Initial Release September 1981. Fast Response Survey System.
INSTITUTION Westat Research, Inc., Rockville, Md.
SPONS AGENCY National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO FRSS-R-13; NCES-83-208
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Aid; *Federal Programs; *Grantsmanship; National Surveys; Program Development; *Program Proposals; *Questionnaires; Rural Urban Differences; Staff Development; Suburban Schools; Tables (Data)

ABSTRACT

This report evaluates data collected in the 1981 survey of school district perceptions of the benefits and problems associated with 27 federal competitive grant programs. The survey had three general objectives: (1) determine the number of districts participating in these programs from 1978-80, (2) identify why districts do or do not apply for program grants, and (3) determine the costs and benefits of administering the grant programs. The report highlights the findings, which include a delineated evaluation of statistical data. The major factors found to be discouraging applicants are: confusing or cumbersome application procedures, lack of staff to prepare applications, and perceived low chances of receiving grant awards. Among the five listed potential benefits of these programs, respondents cited supplementation of local funds and opportunities to develop new programs most frequently. A majority of the districts perceived excessive paperwork as the primary problem in administration of these grant programs. One half of the districts perceived either curriculum development or staff development as the most helpful feature of federal competitive education grants. Included with the report are appendixes and a copy of the survey questionnaire. (MD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

School District Perceptions of Federal Competitive Education Programs

Final Report

Initial Release September 1981

National Center for Education Statistics

FRSS Report No. 13

ED234490

EA 016 077

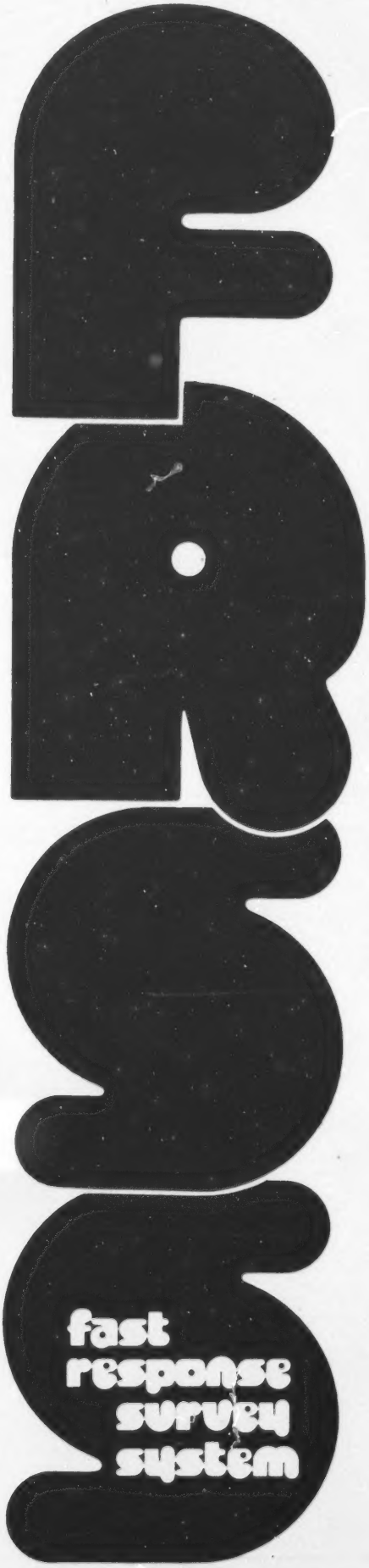
HIGHLIGHTS

- According to school districts reporting, the major factors discouraging application for Federal competitive education grants were: confusing or cumbersome application procedures (cited by 62 percent of the districts), lack of staff to prepare applications (56 percent), and perceived low chances of receiving awards (50 percent). Each of four other factors were perceived as major disincentives by fewer than one-third of the districts.

- Of five listed potential benefits of Federal competitive education programs, supplementation of local funds and opportunity to develop new programs were mentioned most frequently as major benefits (by 45 and 41 percent of the districts, respectively).

- Fifty-three percent of the districts perceived excessive paperwork to be the primary problem associated with conducting programs under these grants. Other problems included disruptions of staff and services when the grant ends (33 percent), insufficient lead time for program planning (34 percent), and cash flow problems caused by delays in receipt of funds (30 percent).

- One-half of the districts perceived either curriculum development or staff development as the most helpful feature of Federal competitive education grants for their programs.



School District Perceptions of Federal Competitive Education Programs

FRSS Report No. 13

by
Douglas A. Wright
National Center for
Education Statistics

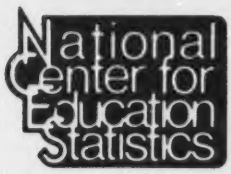
Elizabeth VanderPutten
National Institute of
Education

Elizabeth Farris
Westat, Inc.

U.S. Department of Education
T. H. Bell
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Donald J. Senese
Assistant Secretary

National Center for Education Statistics
Marie D. Eldridge
Administrator



National Center for Education Statistics

"The purpose of the Center shall be to collect and disseminate statistics and other data related to education in the United States and in other nations. The Center shall . . . collect, collate, and, from time to time, report full and complete statistics on the conditions of education in the United States; conduct and publish reports on specialized analyses of the meaning and significance of such statistics; . . . and review and report on education activities in foreign countries."--Section 406(b) of the General Education Provisions Act, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1221e-1).

Other reports of the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS):

No. 1 -- Statewide Developments in Performance-Based Education, 1976; a Survey of State Education Agencies

No. 2 -- Job Placement Services Provided by Local School Systems to High School Students, Graduates, and Dropouts, 1976

No. 3 -- Part-Time Financial Aid Counselors in Institutions of Higher Education, 1977

No. 4 -- Teacher and Administrator Shortages in Public School Systems, Fall 1977

No. 5 -- Training Needs of Public School Administrators; A Survey of Local School Districts, Summer 1978

No. 6 -- Arts Education: Policies and Programs, Winter 1978-79

No. 7 -- School Districts Participating in Multiple Federal Programs, Winter 1978-79

No. 8 -- School District Needs for Technical Assistance 1979

No. 9 -- ESEA Title I Schoolwide Projects: Eligibility and Participation, Winter 1979-80

No. 10-- Access to Bachelor's Degrees Through Evening and Weekend Courses, 1980

No. 11-- Trends in Vocational Education in the Arts 1980

No. 12-- Student Use of Computers in Schools, Fall 1980

Prepared for the National Center for Education Statistics
by Westat, Inc. under
Contract Number 300-79-0517

FOREWORD

Federal competitive education program grants have provided school districts with funds to support projects in a variety of areas, such as bilingual education, youth employment, and education of the gifted and talented. School districts have used competitive program grants to develop new programs, to fund in-service education, and to develop curricula, among other purposes.

This report presents findings of a national survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on school district perceptions of 27 Federal competitive education programs, many of which have since been consolidated into block grants to the States.

The survey was conducted through NCES's Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), established to collect issue-oriented data on emerging educational developments. The preliminary results were first shared with the public in the form of an early release. This report, delayed because of discrepancies between perceptions at the local area and departmental records, is being made available at this time for historical purposes and for policy deliberations concerning the merits of alternative funding mechanisms for education.

Marie D. Eldridge
Administrator

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This survey was conducted for the Department of Education's School Finance Project, pursuant to Section 1203 of the Educational Amendments of 1978, which mandated the study of current and alternative means of providing aid to education.

Emerson Elliot, former director of the School Finance Project, developed the idea of the survey and provided much of its substance. Mark Euritt located literature on competitive programs, researched Federal competitive program files, interviewed many of the program directors, and reviewed all drafts. Thanks also go to other members of the School Finance Project.

Development of the survey involved the efforts of many other persons within the Department: directors of each of the 27 programs; ERIC staff; members of the School Finance Project; George Hesselbacher, Information Resource Management Services; and Mary Hughes and Joe Barnes, Assistance Management and Procurement Services.

The survey was coordinated with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) through its Committee on Evaluation and Information Systems (CEIS). Chaired by Bertha McCloskey (Missouri), the panel included Ed Allen (Florida), James Mitchell (Iowa), and George Rush (CCSSO).

A number of NCES staff members participated in the survey and contributed to this report including Jeanette Goor and Jean Brandes.

The authors acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of these and other individuals, notably, the FRSS State Coordinators who facilitated the data collection and the respondents who voluntarily provided the requested data.

The survey was conducted by NCES' FRSS contractor, Westat, Inc., a research firm in Rockville, Maryland. The company's survey team included John Barton, Debra Cesare, John Burke, Frances Cohen, and Patricia Congdon.

CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS . . . . . Inside Front Cover

FOREWORD iii

INTRODUCTION 1

SURVEY FINDINGS 2

Application and Success in Federal Competitive Education Grants 2

Disincentives for Application for Federal Competitive Education Grants 5

Perceived Benefits of Federal Competitive Education Programs 7

Perceived Problems in Implementing Federal Competitive Education Programs 8

Most Useful Features of Federal Competitive Education Programs 9

SUMMARY 10

APPENDIXES: I. The Fast Response Survey System 11

Methodology for the Survey of School District Perceptions of Federal Competitive Education Programs 11

Nonsampling Error 12

Standard Errors of the Statistics 16

II. Federal Competitive Education Grants Programs 18

III. Reproduction of Survey Questionnaire . . . Inside Back Cover

TEXT TABLES

1.—Perceived success rate in receiving Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981 3

2.—Estimated applications and awards for major Federal competitive education grants during the two-year period 1978-80: United States, spring 1981 4

3.—Major factors discouraging applications for Federal competitive grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981 6

CONTENTS (Continued)

TEXT TABLES (Continued)

4.--Perceived major benefits of Federal competitive education programs, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981 7

5.--Perceived major problems in conducting programs funded under Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981 8

6.--Perceived most helpful aspect of Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981 9

APPENDIX TABLES

A.--Universe of public school districts, by enrollment size and region 12

B.--Classification of districts into application and award categories based on survey and grants data 14

C.--Demographic characteristics of districts whose survey data classifications of application and award rate agree with their grants data classifications, and those whose classifications do not agree 14

D.--Questionnaire responses of districts whose survey data classifications of application and award rate agree with their grants data classifications, and districts whose classifications do not agree 15

E.--Standard errors of selected questionnaire items 17

INTRODUCTION

In 1978 the School Finance Project was established to conduct studies on the financing of public and private elementary and secondary education in the United States, including the Federal role in education.

While most of the resources for the study of Federal programs were devoted to the large formula programs for disadvantaged and handicapped children, the School Finance Project also reviewed the appropriateness and effects of the smaller programs that provided funds to school districts, universities, non-profit organizations, and other educational units on the basis of competitive proposals (see appendix II). These latter programs were designed to affect educational practice: teaching methods, research, in-service education curriculum, and the like. The major recipients of these grants were school districts.

Despite their relatively small size, these competitive grant programs have generated considerable controversy. While they have provided school districts with valuable supplemental funding to support innovation and to provide special services, they have been blamed for imposing outside priorities on local districts, creating administrative problems for applicants and recipients, and diverting district resources to the process of competing for grants and away from more important educational concerns.

The School Finance Project commissioned this survey to ascertain school district perceptions of the benefits and problems associated with competitive grant programs. District respondents were asked their perceptions of 27 of these programs.

Conducted in the spring of 1981, the survey had three general objectives:

- To determine the extent to which school districts participated in these competitive programs during the period 1978-80;
- To identify reasons why school districts do or do not apply for program grants; and
- To determine the perceived costs and benefits of accepting and administering the awards.

In 1981, Congress combined many of the competitive grant programs into block grants to be awarded to the States under Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). Such consolidation was designed to give States more direct responsibility in providing assistance to local school districts. The programs transferred to Chapter 2 include most of the 27 examined in this survey.

The estimates in this report are based on sample data that have been weighted to produce national estimates. The methodology for this survey, sampling error, and nonsampling error are discussed in appendix I. Because of the variety and complexity of competitive and noncompetitive programs existing at the time of the survey, some respondents had difficulty in focusing on the 27 specified competitive programs. This issue is discussed in the section on nonsampling errors. The survey questionnaire is presented in appendix III.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Application and Success in Federal Competitive Education Grants

School districts were asked to characterize their overall success in receiving grants during 1978-79 and 1979-80 under the 27 Federal competitive education programs specified in the questionnaire. One-third of the districts (33 percent) indicated that they had not applied for any of these grants during this period; roughly another third (37 percent) characterized their success rate as "low" or indicated that they had received no such grants; and the remaining third (30 percent) reported "medium" or "high" success rates (table 1).

In table 1 and subsequent tables, national estimates are presented for all school districts and for districts classified according to enrollment size, region, and metro status (urban, suburban, rural). Since the great majority of the Nation's school districts are small (less than 2,500 students) and rural, findings for such districts seldom differ significantly from one another or from the national total. However, large (10,000 or more students) and urban school districts are much less numerous (fewer than 5 percent of all school districts in the Nation), and their experiences are often somewhat different from those of other districts.

As one might expect, large districts were more likely to have applied for grants than were small districts. Relatively few large districts (15 percent) reported that they had not applied for any of the listed grants, whereas 37 percent of the small districts reported no applications; 11 percent of the large districts indicated that they had received no grants, versus 20 percent of small districts. Conversely, over half (54 percent) of the large districts reported medium to high success rates in obtaining these competitive grants, compared with 27 percent of small districts.

One somewhat surprising aspect of these findings is the apparent high rate of district application for the 27 listed Federal competitive grants. Since only one-third of all school districts indicated that they had not applied for any of these grants, it appears that the remaining two-thirds had applied for at least one grant under these programs. Partly as a check on this finding and partly as a basis for describing the extent of interest in individual competitive programs, a search was made of Department of Education Grants Management Files to determine, by program, the actual numbers of grant applicants and recipients among districts in the FRSS sample over the two-year period. These sample findings then were weighted to produce national estimates. The estimates for 14 major Federal competitive education programs are summarized in table 2. 1/ As this table shows, Bilingual Education, ESAA Basic Grants, and Gifted and Talented were the most heavily competed programs during the two-year period 1978-80; applications for each of the other programs were received from fewer than 400 districts.

Across all 27 programs listed in the questionnaire, the check of Federal grant files revealed that an estimated maximum of 28 percent of the Nation's approximately 16,000 school districts applied for one or another of these particular grants during 1978-80. This application rate estimate contrasts sharply with the reported 66 percent application rate obtained from the survey questionnaire and suggests that questionnaire findings cannot be interpreted solely with reference to the specified programs and time periods.

It is quite possible that many districts' responses actually reflected their recent experience with and perceptions of Federal education programs in general, and perhaps other Federal and State programs as well, not just with the 27 Federal competitive education programs or with the two years specified in the survey questionnaire. Conceivably, sample districts that responded narrowly and specifically with reference to the designated programs might have produced a different response pattern than those that responded broadly on the basis of their overall experience with Federal education programs. However, the data do not support this suggestion. Districts whose reported grant application and success rate matched information from Federal grants files were very similar, both demographically and in terms of responses to other questionnaire items, to those whose reported experience did not match Federal records (for further details, see appendix I). Since the responses of the two groups were so similar, we believe that the survey estimates are a reasonably accurate reflection of school districts' perceptions of benefits and problems associated with competitive programs. These findings are presented in the following sections.

1/ See appendix I for discussion of all 27 programs.

Table 1.--Perceived success rate in receiving Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981

District characteristics	Number of districts	Perceived success rate				
		High	Medium	Low	No awards	Did not apply
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total.....	15,834	1,698	3,059	2,625	3,090	5,275
		(In percents of column 2)				
Total.....	15,834	11	19	17	20	33
Enrollment size:						
Less than 2,500.....	11,946	11	17	15	20	37
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	11	23	20	21	25
10,000 or more.....	717	12	42	20	11	15
Region:						
North Atlantic.....	3,067	11	27	19	20	23
Great Lakes and Plains..	6,315	9	17	16	23	36
Southeast.....	1,739	7	23	26	22	23
West and Southwest.....	4,713	15	17	13	14	41
Metro status:						
Rural.....	10,623	10	18	16	19	36
Suburban.....	4,831	11	21	17	22	29
Urban.....	381	20	42	12	12	14

Note.--Row percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2.--Estimated applications and awards for major Federal competitive education grants during the two-year period 1978-80: United States, spring 1981

Competitive programs	Number of districts applying	Number of districts receiving at least one award	Percent of applicant districts receiving award(s)
Bilingual education (13.403):			
New	615	281	46
Continuation	414	396	96
ESAA basic grants (13.525):			
New	809	588	73
Continuation	125	125	100
Gifted and talented (13.562):			
New	545	75	14
Continuation	0	0	0
Community education (13.563):			
New	361	90	25
Continuation	52	0	0
Follow through (13.433):			
New	1	0	0
Continuation	209	209	100
Metric education (13.561):			
New	352	33	9
Continuation	1	0	0
Arts in education (13.566):			
New	263	56	21
Continuation	0	0	0
ESAA Magnet schools (13.589):			
New	201	198	99
Continuation	19	15	79
Teacher corps (13.489):			
New	125	53	42
Continuation	115	110	96
Handicapped research (13.443):			
New	163	11	7
Continuation	33	33	100
Teacher centers (13.416):			
New	7	2	29
Continuation	107	107	100
Early education for handicapped (13.444):			
New	111	24	22
Continuation	67	43	64
Ethnic heritage (13.549):			
New	138	2	1
Continuation	0	0	0
Environmental education (13.522):			
New	102	1	1
Continuation	0	0	0

Note.--These entries are weighted estimates from the FRSS sample.

Disincentives for Application for Federal Competitive Education Grants

Districts were asked the extent to which they are discouraged by the following factors from applying for Federal competitive education grants:

- Insufficient lead time or information,
- Confusing or cumbersome application procedures,
- Staff not available to prepare applications,
- Low success rate in past applications,
- Lack of fit between programs and district needs or priorities,
- Low odds of receiving awards, and
- Awards funded at much lower levels than requested.

Most frequently cited as a "major" discouraging factor was confusing or cumbersome application procedures (62 percent of all districts), followed closely by lack of staff available to prepare grant applications (56 percent) and by perceived "low odds" of receiving awards (50 percent), as shown in table 3. Relatively few districts expressed major concerns about Federal programs not fitting district needs (30 percent), about insufficient lead time for preparing applications (27 percent), about low success rate in past applications (27 percent), or about the prospect that programs might be funded at levels lower than requested (15 percent).

The pattern of application-related concerns among large districts and urban districts was somewhat different than among small or rural districts. Large-enrollment districts were much less likely than small-enrollment districts to view lack of internal application capabilities as major problems (31 percent versus 60 percent for lack of available staff; 38 percent versus 65 percent for lack of familiarity with application procedures). Among large districts, concerns about discouraging factors focused largely on external problems (e.g., 51 percent perceived low odds as an important consideration).

Table 3.--Major factors discouraging applications for Federal competitive grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981

District characteristics	Number of districts	Major factors discouraging application						
		Procedure confusing/ cumbersome	Staff unavail-able	Low odds	Don't fit needs	Lack of time/ infor-mation	Low success in past	Funding lower than requested
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Total.....	15,834	9,829	8,870	7,869	4,688	4,211	4,197	2,377
		(In percents of column 2)						
Total.....	15,834	62	56	50	30	27	27	15
Enrollment size:								
Less than 2,500.....	11,946	65	60	48	32	26	27	14
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	58	47	54	23	26	25	18
10,000 or more	717	38	31	51	22	37	22	16
Region:								
North Atlantic.....	3,067	60	53	60	15	24	39	15
Great Lakes and Plains.....	6,315	66	60	52	32	25	27	15
Southeast.....	1,739	53	43	48	30	31	28	11
West and Southwest...	4,713	62	57	40	36	30	17	17
Metro status:								
Rural.....	10,623	66	58	47	34	26	24	13
Suburban.....	4,831	56	53	55	20	27	31	19
Urban.....	381	28	32	58	14	34	25	20

Perceived Benefits of Federal Competitive Education Programs

Districts were asked to rate the importance of the following five ways in which Federal competitive education programs might be beneficial to them:

- Opportunity to develop new programs,
- Supplement to local funds,
- Ability to continue existing local programs,
- Stimulus for teacher/staff initiative and professional growth, and
- Promotion of district goals and objectives.

Most frequently cited as major benefits were supplement to local funds (45 percent of all districts) and opportunity to develop new programs (41 percent), as indicated in table 4. However, each of the remaining benefits—ability to continue existing local programs, stimulus for professional growth of staff, and promotion of district goals—also was cited frequently as major (by 31 to 34 percent of districts).

In small districts, supplementation of local funds stood out as the single major perceived benefit of Federal competitive education programs (47 percent versus 29 to 39 percent for other benefits). Among large districts, opportunity to develop new programs (55 percent) and to promote district goals (44 percent) were cited as major benefits at least as frequently as supplementation of local funds (44 percent).

Table 4.--Perceived major benefits of Federal competitive education programs, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981

District characteristics	Number of districts	Perceived major benefits of programs				
		Supplement to local funds	Develop new programs	Continue programs	Stimulus for staff	Promotion of district goals
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total.....	15,834	7,176	6,465	5,346	5,033	4,883
		(In percents of column 2)				
Total.....	15,834	45	41	34	32	31
Enrollment size:						
Less than 2,500.....	11,946	47	39	35	29	29
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	39	45	33	40	36
10,000 or more.....	717	44	55	18	38	44
Region:						
North Atlantic.....	3,067	51	45	33	43	35
Great Lakes and Plains..	6,315	44	36	36	24	27
Southeast.....	1,739	36	44	30	37	35
West and Southwest.....	4,713	47	43	34	33	31
Metro status:						
Rural.....	10,623	43	39	30	30	28
Suburban.....	4,831	49	43	42	36	36
Urban.....	381	57	56	25	38	38

Perceived Problems in Implementing Federal Competitive Education Programs

Districts also were asked to rate the importance of the following seven problems associated with conducting Federal competitive education programs:

- Insufficient lead time for planning,
- Cash flow complications due to lag in receipt of funds,
- Tensions created among staff,
- Fragmented curriculum,
- Conflict with district policies or procedures,
- Disruptions in staff or services when program ends, and
- Paperwork or other costs outweigh benefits.

Excessive paperwork was cited most often (by 53 percent of all districts) as a major problem in carrying out these programs (table 5). Other problems frequently mentioned were disruptions of staff or services when the program ends (38 percent), insufficient lead time for program planning (34 percent), and cash flow complications caused by a lag in receipt of funds (30 percent). Seldom reported as major problems were conflict with district policies or procedures (9 percent), tensions created among staff (12 percent), and fragmentation of curriculum (14 percent).

The rankings of program implementation problems were roughly the same for large districts as for medium-sized and small districts. The problems that most strongly differentiated small and large districts were cash flow and paperwork; both were seen more frequently as major problems by small districts than by large ones (32 percent versus 17 percent for cash flow complications, and 55 versus 44 percent for paperwork).

Table 5.--Perceived major problems in conducting programs funded under Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981

District characteristics	Number of districts	Major problems in conducting programs						
		Paperwork	Disruption when grant ends	Insufficient lead time for planning	Cash flow	Fragmented curriculum	Staff tensions	Conflict with policies
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Total.....	15,834	8,428	5,996	5,340	4,746	2,229	1,892	1,397
		(In percents of column 2)						
Total.....	15,834	53	38	34	30	14	12	9
Enrollment size:								
Less than 2,500.....	11,946	55	34	33	32	14	12	10
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	49	51	36	26	13	12	6
10,000 or more.....	717	44	44	35	17	16	13	11
Region:								
North Atlantic.....	3,067	49	32	34	34	9	8	7
Great Lakes and Plains..	6,315	58	41	31	28	16	12	9
Southeast.....	1,739	53	55	34	25	24	16	10
West and Southwest.....	4,713	49	30	36	32	11	13	9
Metro status:								
Rural.....	10,623	53	38	34	30	15	12	10
Suburban.....	4,831	54	36	32	32	11	11	6
Urban.....	381	44	56	43	15	21	20	7

Most Useful Features of Federal Competitive Education Programs

Districts were asked to rank order, from most helpful to least helpful, six aspects of Federal competitive education grants. Table 6 shows the percent of districts that identified each of the six as being the most helpful aspect (that is, ranked each as "1"). Opportunity for curriculum development most often was identified as the most useful programmatic feature of Federal competitive education programs (31 percent of all districts). Less frequently cited were opportunities for professional staff development (20 percent), acquisition of instructional materials (16 percent), and updating of facilities (14 percent). Research and hiring new staff seldom were identified as the most useful aspects of these programs (3 percent and 6 percent, respectively).

While curriculum development and staff development were the most frequently top-ranked features of Federal programs for most district subgroups, this tendency was especially pronounced for large districts and urban districts. Urban districts focused on these two aspects almost exclusively (86 percent). Rural districts perceived the ability to obtain instructional materials and to improve facilities as being as useful as staff development.

Table 6.--Perceived most helpful aspect of Federal competitive education grants, by district characteristics: United States, spring 1981

District characteristics	Number of districts	Most helpful aspect of grants					
		Curriculum development	Staff development	Instructional materials	Updating facilities	Hiring new staff	Research
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total.....	15,834	4,906	3,215	2,529	2,188	983	551
				(In percents of column 2)			
Total.....	15,834	31	20	16	14	6	3
Enrollment size:							
Less than 2,500.....	11,946	28	18	18	16	6	4
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	41	24	9	9	9	2
10,000 or more.....	717	36	34	7	8	3	4
Region:							
North Atlantic.....	3,067	30	26	13	11	10	2
Great Lakes and Plains..	6,315	28	22	16	16	5	5
Southeast.....	1,739	29	25	16	12	4	2
West and Southwest.....	4,713	36	12	17	14	5	4
Metro status:							
Rural.....	10,623	27	19	18	17	5	4
Suburban.....	4,831	38	22	12	8	9	3
Urban.....	381	49	37	4	1	1	1

Note.--Percents may not add to 100 because some districts gave tied ranks.

SUMMARY

Federal competitive education programs have provided support to local school districts for projects targeted to many specific areas, such as early education for handicapped children, teacher centers, community education, and arts education. Programs in the areas of bilingual education, gifted and talented, and ESAA basic grants attracted the largest numbers of applications from districts across the Nation during 1978-80.

Approximately two-thirds of all school districts indicated that they had applied for one or more grants during 1978-80 under one or more of 27 specified Federal competitive education programs; of these districts, 45 percent characterized their success in obtaining grants as medium or high. From examination of Federal grants management records, it appears that these findings overstate the actual extent of application and participation in these particular programs during these particular years. It is conceivable that many districts' responses reflected their recent experiences with Federal education programs generally, as well as with other Federal and State programs, rather than with the 27 listed competitive programs in the specified time period. However, a marked similarity exists in the demographic characteristics and questionnaire responses of districts whose reported application and success matched Federal grants records and those whose reported application and success did not match Federal records. Because of this similarity, the report treats both sets of responses equally as applicable to Federal competitive education programs.

One apparent difficulty with Federal competitive funding programs is that districts frequently lack the specialized resources needed for preparation of grant application materials. This problem is more pronounced in rural areas, but 40 percent of the urban districts also perceived difficulty in this area. Lack of needed staff resources and unfamiliarity with application procedures were reported as major problems by about 60 percent of rural districts and districts with enrollments of less than 2,500, in contrast to fewer than 40 percent of urban districts and districts enrolling 10,000 or more students. Since three-quarters of the school districts in the Nation are small and two-thirds are rural, these problems appear to have been significant and to have made it difficult for many districts to compete effectively for Federal education funds.

Excessive paperwork was by far the most frequently cited major problem in conducting programs funded under Federal competitive grants; it was reported to be a major problem by 53 percent of districts overall. This problem, together with cash flow problems caused by delay in receiving funds, was perceived more strongly among small or rural districts than among large or urban districts.

On the positive side, the survey findings also indicate that school districts perceived many benefits from Federal competitive education programs. Supplementation of local funds and opportunity to develop new programs were reported as major benefits by more than 40 percent of all districts. Other benefits, including opportunity to continue existing programs, stimulus for professional growth of district staff, and opportunity to promote district goals, also were reported as major benefits by 30 percent or more of the districts.

In rank ordering six potentially useful features of Federal competitive education programs, over half of all districts ranked either curriculum development or staff development as the most useful. This trend was especially pronounced among large or urban districts, where one or the other of these two factors was top-ranked 70 percent or more of the time.

This survey collected data in spring 1981 concerning district perceptions of the benefits and problems associated with 27 major Federal competitive education programs. Many of these Federal programs have been consolidated into block grants to States since the survey was conducted. These findings, in conjunction with other data, will allow policy makers to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various aid mechanisms.

APPENDIX I

The Fast Response Survey System

The Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) was established by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) so that education data, urgently needed for planning and policy formulation, could be collected quickly and with minimum burden on respondents.

The FRSS covers six education sectors:

State education agencies (SEA's)

Local education agencies (LEA's)

Public elementary and secondary schools

Nonpublic elementary and secondary schools

Institutions of higher education

Noncollegiate postsecondary schools with occupational programs.

All 50 States and the District of Columbia are included in the SEA sector. For each of the other sectors, a stratified random sample was designed to allow valid national estimates to be made. The sample sizes range from 500 to 1,000.

A data-collection network involving both respondents and coordinators was developed in each sector. Coordinators assist in the data collection by maintaining liaison with the sampled institutions or agencies. The respondents, selected to report for their institutions or agencies, voluntarily provide the policy-oriented data requested in the questionnaires.

The Fast Response Survey System provides NCES with a mechanism for furnishing data quickly and efficiently. All aspects of the system--the sample design, the network of coordinators and respondents, and the short questionnaires--have been designed with this end in mind.

Methodology for the Survey of School District Perceptions of Federal Competitive Education Programs

The national sample of local education agencies used for this survey was allocated to strata approximately proportional to the cumulative square root of enrollment size. The universe of LEA's was stratified by district enrollment size and sorted by geographic region prior to sample selection. A stratified, systematic sample of 636 local education agencies was selected from the universe of 15,834 public school districts in the United States.

After adjusting for school district closings and refusals to participate in the Fast Response Survey System, the number of potential respondents was reduced to 576. Questionnaires were mailed to these respondents in April 1981. Data collection continued until a 95 percent response (549 questionnaires) was obtained.

The response data were weighted to produce national estimates, and a weight adjustment was made to account for survey nonresponse. The weights were calculated for each cell of a two-way tabulation of enrollment size and geographic region. Table A shows the cell and marginal totals used in the weighting.

Table A.--Universe of public school districts, by enrollment size and region

Enrollment size	Total	Region			
		North Atlantic	Great Lakes and Plains	South-east	West and Southwest
Total.....	15,834	3,067	6,315	1,739	4,713
Less than 2,500....	11,946	1,990	5,262	833	3,861
2,500-4,999.....	2,067	630	635	427	375
5,000-9,999.....	1,104	306	271	293	234
10,000-24,999.....	530	121	113	120	176
25,000-149,999.....	178	17	32	65	64
150,000 or more....	9	3	2	1	3

Source: NCES 1977-78 Universe of Local Public School Systems, ELSEGIS V, Part B2.

Nonsampling Error

Data on actual applications and awards for the 27 competitive education programs were obtained from the Department of Education (ED) Grants Management Files. The names of the school districts in the survey sample were matched manually with districts listed in the Grants Management Universe Files, and data on these districts' applications for the 27 programs were added to the survey data file.

Supplementation of the survey data with grants data was intended to serve two purposes: to provide information on each of the specified programs, and to compare respondents' perceptions of their success rates with actual success rates. These goals were not realized, however, because of a basic discrepancy between the two data sets relating to the question of whether respondent districts had actually applied for any of the 27 competitive education grants.

According to the survey data, an estimated 66 percent (10,472) of all districts had submitted one or more applications during 1978-80. By contrast, the initial estimate from the grants data showed that only 16 percent (2,576) of the districts had submitted applications for these 27 programs during these two years. Approximately 9,000 applications for the programs were made, with an average of 3.4 applications per applicant district, according to the ED files.

In an attempt to reconcile the two estimates, the Grants Management Files were reexamined. This process revealed that the grants files contained complete and accurate information for most of the 27 programs. However, a few programs for which some districts had applied had not been implemented as competitive grant programs and, therefore, were not included in the grants files.

Since several programs had been excluded, the initial estimate of a 16 percent actual application rate should be inflated somewhat. Program specialists estimated that the excluded programs represented a maximum of 2,000 applications. If each of the 2,000 applications was submitted by a different district and if these districts did not overlap with those already identified as applicants (both unlikely events), the application rate would be about 28 percent, still markedly different from the 66 percent survey estimate.

Obviously, respondent districts overstated the degree of their application for and participation in the 27 competitive education programs. Some of the factors that may have contributed to this overstatement are listed below:

- Many respondents had responsibility for coordinating all Federal education programs, not simply competitive ones. Because of the variety and complexity of Federal programs, it may have been difficult to focus only on the 27 listed programs.

- Several competitive education programs dealt with population groups that also are served through entitlement programs, such as handicapped students and those with limited proficiency in English. Some respondents may have focused on their districts participation in these entitlement programs.

- District perceptions may have been based not only on Federal education programs but also on State and other Federal programs.

- Several competitive programs were not included in the list of 27 programs; some respondents may have reported their participation in these other competitive programs.

- Some respondents may have reported their districts' participation in competitive programs beyond the two-year period specified in the questionnaire.

The finding that many districts erroneously reported applications for competitive programs raises questions about the validity of their perceptions of the benefits and problems associated with these programs. However, we believe that their perceptions are reasonably accurate, based on the following analysis.

Each respondent district was classified as to whether it had not applied for any grant, had applied but received no awards, or had applied and received one or more awards. This classification was performed both for survey data and grants data; table B presents estimated population counts for each of these cateogries. Districts then were divided into two groups: those whose survey data classification agreed with their grants data classification (6,662 districts), and those whose survey and grants data classifications did not agree (9,085 districts). The demographic characteristics and survey responses of these two groups were compared.

As shown in table C, the overall demographic characteristics (enrollment size, geographic region, and metro status) of these two groups are quite similar. Further, both groups show similar responses to the questionnaire items (table D). On the basis of this comparison, we conclude that the reported data are fairly accurate representations of district perceptions concerning Federal competitive education programs.

Table B.--Classification of districts into application and award categories based on survey and grants data

Survey data	Grants files data 1/			
	Total	Did not apply	Applied, received no awards	Applied, received one or more awards
Total	15,747	13,172	1,334	1,241
Did not apply	5,274	5,125	108	41
Applied, received no awards	3,091	2,542	443	106
Applied, received one or more awards	7,383	5,505	784	1,094

1/ Based on complete data from 22 (out of 27) programs encompassing most of the applicant districts.

Table C.--Demographic characteristics of districts whose survey data classifications of application and award rate agree with their grants data classifications, and those whose classifications do not agree

District characteristics	All districts	Agreement between survey data and grants data classifications	
		Agree	Do not agree
Total	15,834	6,662	9,085
	(In percents of row 1)		
Enrollment size:			
Less than 2,500	75	72	78
2,500 - 9,999	20	22	19
10,000 or more	5	7	3
Region:			
North Atlantic	19	15	23
Great Lakes and Plains	40	36	43
Southeast	11	12	10
West and Southwest	30	36	24
Metro status:			
Rural	67	66	68
Suburban	31	30	31
Urban	2	4	1

Table D.--Questionnaire responses of districts whose survey data classifications of application and award rate agree with their grants data classifications, and districts whose classifications do not agree

Questionnaire items	All districts	Agreement between survey data and grants data classifications	
		Agree	Do not agree
Total	15,834	6,662	9,085
		(In percents of row 1)	
Major factors discouraging applications for Federal competitive education grants:			
Confusing/cumbersome procedures	62	63	62
Staff unavailable	56	54	58
Low odds of success	50	52	48
Programs don't fit needs	30	33	27
Lack of time/information	27	31	24
Low success in the past	27	22	30
Funding lower than requested	15	17	14
Major perceived benefits of Federal competitive education programs:			
Supplement to local funds	45	41	49
Development of new programs	41	39	41
Continue existing programs	34	27	39
Stimulus for staff	32	33	30
Promotion of district goals	31	26	35
Major perceived problems in conducting programs funded under Federal competitive education grants:			
Paperwork	53	55	53
Disruption when grant ends	38	43	35
Insufficient lead time for planning	34	31	36
Cash flow complications	30	32	29
Fragmented curriculum	14	19	11
Staff tensions	12	12	12
Conflict with policies	9	10	8

Standard Errors of the Statistics

The findings presented in this report are estimates based on the FRSS school district sample and, consequently, are subject to sampling variability. If the questionnaire had been sent to a different sample, the responses would not have been identical; some numbers might have been higher, while others might have been lower. The estimated standard error of a statistic (a measure of the variation due to sampling) can be used to examine the precision obtained in a particular sample. If all possible samples were surveyed under similar conditions, intervals of 1.645 standard errors below to 1.645 standard errors above a particular statistic would include the average result of these samples in approximately 90 percent of the cases. For example, for the number of districts indicating that confusing application procedures were a major factor discouraging applications (table E), the 90 percent confidence interval is from 9,159 to 10,499 districts (9,829 + 1.645 times 407). If this procedure were followed for every possible sample, about 90 percent of the intervals would include the average number from all possible samples.

Table E presents standard errors for selected questionnaire items. Specific statements of comparison in the text are significant at least at the 80 percent confidence level, and most are significant at the 90 percent level. Standard errors for other questionnaire items and statistics presented in this report, not included in table E, can be obtained on request.

Table E.--Standard errors of selected questionnaire items

Item	Estimate	Standard error
Number of districts indicating:		
Major factors discouraging applications for programs:		
Confusing or cumbersome application procedures	9,829	407
Staff not available to prepare applications	8,871	307
Low odds of receiving awards	7,869	327
Programs do not fit district needs or priorities	4,688	461
Insufficient lead time or information	4,211	337
Low success rate in past applications	4,197	311
Awards funded at much lower levels than requested	2,377	291
Major benefits of programs:		
Supplement to local funds	7,176	452
Opportunity to develop new programs	6,465	418
Ability to continue existing programs	5,346	390
Stimulus for teacher/staff growth	5,033	362
Promotion of district goals	4,888	375
Major problems with conducting programs:		
Paperwork or other costs outweigh benefits	8,428	431
Disruption in staff/services when program ends	5,996	306
Insufficient lead time for planning	5,340	415
Cash flow complications	4,746	377
Fragmented curriculum	2,229	274
Tensions created among staff	1,892	233
Conflict with district policies or procedures	1,397	249
Most helpful aspect (rank of "1") of programs:		
Curriculum development	4,906	359
Professional staff development	3,215	256
Instructional materials	2,529	272
Updating facilities	2,188	209
Hiring new staff	983	157
Research	551	161
Number of districts that applied for new ESAA basic grants	809	119
Number of districts that received at least one new ESAA basic grant	588	99

APPENDIX II. FEDERAL COMPETITIVE EDUCATION GRANTS PROGRAMS

(Providing grants to school districts)

1. Follow Through (13.433 or 84.014)
2. Career Education Program (13.554 or 84.074)
3. Teachers Centers (13.416 or 84.006)
4. Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA)--Basic and Transitional Grants (13.525 or 84.056 and 13.532 or 84.059)
5. Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA)--Magnet Schools and University/Business Cooperation (13.589 or 84.102)
6. Early Education for Handicapped Children (13.444 or 84.024)
7. Gifted and Talented Program (13.562 or 84.080)
8. Handicapped Research and Demonstration and/or Model Programs (13.443 or 84.023 and 13.568 or 84.026)
9. Citizens Education for Cultural Understanding--Global Education Program (13.581 or 84.095)
10. Fulbright-Hayes Teacher Exchange--Foreign Curriculum Consultants (13.439 or 84.020)
11. Community Education Program (13.563 or 84.081)
12. Correction Education (Cat. No. not yet assigned)
13. Youth Employment Program (Cat. No. not yet assigned)
14. National Diffusion Network Program (13.553 or 84.073)
15. Teachers Corps (13.489 or 84.045)
16. Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education (13.420 or 84.008)
17. Arts in Education (13.566 or 84.084)
18. Basic Skills Improvement Program (13.599 or 84.105)
19. Consumer Education (13.564 or 84.082)
20. Environmental Education (13.522)
21. Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (13.549 or 84.070)
22. Law-Related Education (13.693 or 84.123)
23. Metric Education Program (13.561 or 84.079)
24. Special Initiatives--Secretary's Discretionary Program (13.598 or 84.122)
25. Women's Educational Equity Act Program (13.565 or 84.083)
26. Bilingual Education (13.403 or 84.003)
    - Basic Projects
    - Demonstration Projects
    - Desegregation Support Program
    - Materials Development Projects
    - Support Services Projects.
27. Bilingual Vocational Training (13.558 or 84.077)

Note: Numbers in parentheses, following the program titles, refer to the old and new numbers, respectively, in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Education Assistance Programs. The new numbers were assigned in 1980 after the establishment of the U.S. Department of Education.

* U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1983-381-054:117

APPENDIX III. REPRODUCTION OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

FAST RESPONSE SURVEY SYSTEM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

Form approved
FEDAC No. S-230
App. Exp. 11/81

SURVEY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT PERCEPTIONS OF FEDERAL COMPETITIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

This report is authorized by law (20 U.S.C. 1221e-1). While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely.

Definition for purposes of this survey:

Federal competitive education grants (programs): Grants awarded directly to school districts by the U.S. Department of Education on the basis of competitive application procedures under 27 programs (list attached). The survey does NOT include grants awarded on a formula basis nor programs administered through the State.

Note: Please answer all questions whether or not your district has ever applied for such grants.

1. To what extent does each of the following factors discourage your district from applying for any, or more, Federal competitive education grants? For each factor, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Factor	Degree of discouragement		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Insufficient lead time and/or information			
b. Confusing and/or cumbersome application procedures			
c. Staff not available to prepare applications			
d. Low success rate in past applications			
e. Programs do not fit district needs and/or priorities			
f. Low odds of receiving awards			
g. Awards funded at much lower levels than requested			
h. Other (specify)			

2. How important to your district is each of the following actual or perceived benefits attributable to Federal competitive education grants? For each benefit, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Benefit (actual or perceived)	Degree of importance		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Opportunity to develop new programs			
b. Supplement to local funds			
c. Ability to continue existing, local programs			
d. Stimulus for teacher/staff initiative and professional growth			
e. Promotion of district goals and/or objectives			
f. Other (specify)			

3. How important to your district is each of the following actual or perceived problems associated with conducting programs funded under Federal competitive education grants? For each problem, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Problem (actual or perceived)	Degree of importance		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Insufficient lead time for planning			
b. Cash flow complications due to lag in receipt of funds			
c. Tensions created among staff			
d. Fragmented curriculum			
e. Conflict with district policies and/or procedures			
f. Disruptions in staff/services when program ends			
g. Paperwork and/or other costs outweigh benefits			
h. Other (specify)			

4. How helpful to your district would each of the following aspects of a Federal competitive education grant be? Assign a rank to each, using "1" to indicate the most helpful and "6" to indicate the least helpful.

Aspect	Rank	Aspect	Rank
a. Curriculum development		d. Research	
b. Professional staff development		e. Hiring new staff	
c. Instructional materials		f. Updating facilities	

5. How successful has your district been in receiving grant awards under these programs during the two-year period of 1978-79 and 1979-80?

Award success rate: High _____ Medium _____ Low _____ No awards _____

Not applicable: Did not apply _____

Name and title of person completing this form:

_____ Phone: ( ) _____

School district: _____ State: _____ Date: _____

ED (NCES) 2379-13, 4/81